

## ***What to Do if Someone You Know is Raped:***

If you are in a position of trust and are able to offer assistance to the victim of a recently committed rape, we suggest that the following steps be taken without delay:

### **Be supportive.**

Many women will not seek help because they fear that no one will believe them. A victim of sexual assault should be treated with dignity and respect. Non-judgmental belief in her at this time is crucial. Focusing on the facts as reported by the victim, and recording them completely, can be very reassuring to her. In the rare instances where false accusations of rape are made, nothing will be lost by a supportive attitude. In all other cases, doubting her credibility can devastate the victim.

### **Encourage her to seek medical assistance.**

Medical treatment is usually a victim's most urgent need. Even if a woman is reluctant to undergo a medical examination for the purposes of reporting or prosecuting the rapist, she should be treated for sexually transmitted diseases.

Additionally, the victim may be in shock and not realize an injury has occurred. It is estimated that only one in five cases are reported. Although this estimate cannot be verified, rape crisis counselors note that many women do not report rape to the police or go to a hospital for treatment.

Valid reasons for the reluctance to report assaults include judgmental treatment by medical and legal authorities, humiliation, and secondary victimization. A medical examination is in the woman's best interest, since it is the only way to establish the case against the offender and provide data for possible legal use.

The emergency room staff and treating physician should respond to the rape victim with sympathy and concern. The doctor must demonstrate a caring approach and a positive attitude, as well as understand the additional stress experienced when meeting with the police and various medical personnel.

### **Encourage her to seek medical counseling.**

A rape victim should be encouraged to exercise control over every area of her life as soon as she is able. Overcoming the victimization she has experienced is facilitated by determining her needs and making decisions about how they should be met.

Victims of sexual assault are apt to suffer from depression and suicidal thoughts and attempts — even months after the attack. With this in mind, every attempt

should be made to encourage crisis intervention with trained counselors and social workers who are committed Christians.

Family members and her “significant others” should not try to deal with the rape in isolation. They must be willing to accept Christian counseling treatment to assist in the victim’s total recovery. A family member’s willingness to participate in counseling can profoundly affect the healing process for them, as well as for the victim.

Often the family structure can be stressed to the breaking point in the aftermath of sexual assault, whether it involves an adult or a child. Therapy for just the victim may not be sufficient to prevent severe relationship difficulties.

### **Provide unconditional support and comfort.**

The success of the victim’s recovery depends heavily upon the attitudes of those who are important in her life. The fear of being alone is common after an assault. Friends can help by making sure she is not left alone during the days, sometimes weeks, following the rape.

Provide her with a sense of protection while also reinforcing that the rape was not her fault. Many victims blame themselves — focusing on how they might have been able to prevent the rape. Remind her that the rapist is to blame, not her. And, most importantly, provide reassurances of love and care.

In the period following a rape, the victim may experience a loss of self-esteem, a change in self-perception and/or decreased ability to function or make responsible decisions.

She will be filled with false beliefs, such as “Why did God fail me?” or “Trusting people is dangerous.” The best way to understand what she is feeling is to recall a situation where you felt powerless and afraid.

At this vulnerable time, the rape victim needs a lot of attention to break down her feelings of alienation. Encourage her to communicate feelings and discuss what bothers her the most. Let her lead the conversation and allow her to reveal only as much as she is comfortable sharing.

Your willingness to be helpful, a good listener and an understanding companion is the most practical assistance you can offer. The trauma experienced by the rape victim will be less intense if the relationships that she has with her friends and family are secure and fundamentally sound.

### **Be patient. The recovery process will take time.**

If the victim has obtained good Christian counseling, recent statistics on trauma recovery suggest that after the victim has been allowed to grieve, progression toward an assertive “I can recover” stance is productive.

A common response from a victim, even months after the experience, is a disinterest in normal social and dating situations. If married, the victim will appreciate her partner’s patience in her need to determine when to resume a regular sexual relationship.

One of the tasks of recovery is empowerment to move ahead in life and come away from the experience with a renewed sense of value for herself and a heightened sense of God’s presence and purpose for her life.

It is important to stay in therapy until such integration is reestablished and the ability to maintain feelings of intimacy and normality return.

*Taken from an information sheet prepared by Focus on the Family. To read this information sheet in its entirety, you may request it by calling (800) A-FAMILY and ask for item code FX297.*